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ABSTRACT

The program described in this paper makes beginning reading an activity in which children could use all of their cognitive and affective abilities to experience the images and ideas within the piece. The introduction points out that children can become actively involved in reading by writing poetry because they are creating the reading material that will be the most meaningful to them, since it is actually a part of them. Suggestions for the ideal physical arrangement of the classroom and poetry accessibility are also included in this section of the paper. The second section is a model of a classroom schedule, incorporating reading and writing poetry, that provides four times throughout the day when the following poetry activities would be used: (1) drawing/writing, (2) working with words, (3) listening, and (4) lessons in the areas of science or the family. Sample poems and suggestions for student activities for each of those areas are provided. (DF)

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BEGINNING READING, WRITING AND POETRY

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BEGINNING READING, WRITING, AND POETRY

I. Introduction:

From the first time a child is exposed to words in print, he should be motivated to want to read. This can be done by combining familiar material, or material that is particularly meaningful to him, with a presentation that gets the child actively involved. Poetry is a nice way to do this since it lends itself to being used in many different ways, and since it has a natural rhythm that is not usually present in prose. When children hear a poem, something is left with them through the rhythm, tone, or mood of the piece, even though they might not know the words. What is left with the child should be built on and expanded through well-planned activities designed to pull the child into the text. Beginning reading should not be a passive, third person activity focusing on the learning of facts and details, but rather, the child should use all of his cognitive and affective abilities to experience the sensations, images, feelings, and ideas within the piece (Rosenblatt 1980). Another way the child can become actively involved in reading, besides by talking about or acting out the character roles in a particular poem, is by writing poetry. By writing poems and prose, the child is creating the reading material that will be the most meaningful to him, since it is actually a part of him.

The abilities of reading and writing are closely interrelated, and the development of these skills naturally occurs somewhat simultaneously. When the child enters school, he is normally able to write "words" which are meaningful to him, and to "read" what he has written along with other meaningful print (Cohn 1981). Also, the effects of teaching reading as compared to writing are not separable, and if taught together should support each other and lead to a whole greater than either of the parts. I feel that this would be the case since it has been reported that reading poetry actually encourages the writing of poetry (Shillington 1980), and the writing of poetry creates an excitement within the children which causes them to want to read and share their, and others', poetry (Smith and Park 1977, Koch 1970). Chomsky (1976) has reported that her reading program indirectly aided writing skills. In this case reading acted as a model for the students' writing. It seems logical, then that in any beginning reading program these skills would be taught together.

A. The room:

The set-up of the room should promote writing activities. It should be a mixture of an informal setting, to provide a free enough environment for the children to be able to create and take chances, and a formal environment, to provide through consistency a sense of security and an environment in

which it is all right to make mistakes. A suggested set-up follows.

Each child would have his own desk in which he can keep folders of his work, books he is reading, and other belongings. This would give the child his own space. Children often need this space to feel secure enough to try or experiment with new things. At the beginning of the year the child should be able to pick his seat, and then the child could make a name tag for his desk. As the year goes on, and the child needs to, or wants to, be moved, the desk should move with him. The child should feel that the desk is his for the year, and that the desk is a place he can resort to when he feels the need.

In the room there would be three centers: art/writing, reading, and science. These centers would enable two or three students to have something to do independently, such as when they had completed their required work. The art/writing center would have plain paper available for the children to draw or write on. This center could also be used for the children to illustrate their finished pieces before they are placed into a book. The reading center would contain trade books, the children's published books, and poems written by both the children and published poets. One possible way of setting this up was described in a poetry film series.[1] In this situation, the children in the class built a life-size scarecrow. Old clothes, which were donated by the children's

[1] Pass the Poetry, Please. New York Citation Press 1972.

fathers, were stuffed with newspapers and fastened together with florist's wire. A basketball was then added for a head. When the scarecrow was finished he was topped with a sailor's cap and sunglasses. Surrounding the scarecrow were books the children could read, and pinned to the scarecrow's clothes were poems that the children could take down to read. The scarecrow was hung up and a small rug was placed at his feet marking off the reading area. The science center would have displays of experiments and animals (such as mice, snakes, or bugs). Also in this area there would be a poem that was relevant to the science display.

One final suggestion about the room is that one wall or part of the wall be left open for students to place phrases and ideas. These pieces could be illustrated by the children and used by any one in the class as a possible idea for a longer piece. This wall would act as a sharing point for the children. (This is referred to as the "sharing" wall.)

B. Poetry accessibility:

All of the poems used in the classroom would be accessible to the children in two different ways. First, on the day that the poem is being used, a large chart with the poem written on it would be placed where the children could see it. This chart would be left up the whole day, so that the children would know what poem(s) were going to be talked about and so

they could look back at the poem later in the day. Second, all poems that had been presented to the class would be kept in a three-ring binder in the reading center. These poems would be laminated so that the children could take them out to work with or read when ever they wanted to.

The poems that the class enjoys would be read aloud various times, and would be used with a few different activities. This would aid the reading process, since the more familiar a child is with the poem the more meaningful it will be to him, and the more he can do with it. Also, when the poem is used in more than one setting, it demonstrates that writing is not unifunctional and that in different settings one could take away different aspects of the poem. When the class is familiar with a specific piece, the children would be asked to choral-read it (note: Chomsky 1976, Pouenmire 1977, and Ross 1978 for the advantages of using familiarity and choral reading when teaching reading).

II. Model:

During the day there would be four times in which poetry would be consistently used: Drawing/Writing, Working with Words, Listening, and Science/Family. These exposures would encourage the child to actively interact with poetry by reading, writing, singing, listening, and dramatizing the poems. These activities will help the child develop a better

understanding of how print serves a function and that reading is an active process that requires the child to interact with what he is reading.

A. Drawing/Writing:

The day would start with an activity which required writing and drawing. At first the children would be asked to draw a picture and to write some words about what they drew. After the children start to draw and write, the teacher would also start writing. This procedure would last about five minutes and would provide a model for the children and demonstrate that writing is not just an activity that the children do because they are told to, but rather it is one that they continue to use throughout their lives. After the teacher has written his piece he would start individual conferences--the teacher would go to the child's seat while the child is still working. Each child would be seen at least every other day, and an attempt would be made to see the child every day, but this might not be realistic given normal time constraints.

There are two aspects of writing that need to be considered here: transcribing (including spelling, punctuation, and neatness) and composing (the process of creating and exploring ideas). Sentence structure and grammar would be left alone when the children are first learning to write. Corrections and requests for the child to expand on ideas would occur only

after the child had developed confidence in his ability to do the composing part of writing. This would be done to prevent the transcribing part of writing from interfering with the purpose of writing--to convey a thought or an idea.

During the conference, questions would be asked which do not judge the child's writing but rather help him evaluate his own work, develop methods of expanding his work, and improve his writing on his own. It is not the teacher's job to say what is good or bad, for when you tell a child why you think a piece is good you will often get that result at the expense of the child's experimenting with other methods. On the other hand, if you let a child determine what he likes about his writing he can safely try other methods without letting the teacher down. This is not always easy, since often young children will come up to you and ask "Do you like this?" In this situation it is often best to turn the question back to the child by asking him if he likes it, and why. Other possible questions to ask a child when discussing his writing include: "Can you read to me what this says?", "What is this picture about?", "What do you like about what you wrote?", "What do you not like?", "Why did you decide to write about this?", "Can you tell me more about this?", "Why did you decide to leave this information out?", etc. The conference should be a positive experience--looking at what the child can do rather than what the child cannot do. At this stage the

only transcribing skill would consist of representing each word with at least one letter. No spelling would be given out to the child since that could easily change the focus from the composition part of writing.

After about two weeks, when the children get used to this procedure, they would be allowed to have some of their favorite works displayed for the class to read. If the piece is just a sentence that was said or written then it would be typed up (with corrected grammar and spelling) and placed on the "sharing" wall with a picture. These pieces could be used again in longer pieces either as the exact sentence or as a possible topic for further writing. The longer pieces, after being typed, would have the option of being placed in a "book" (such as a three-ring binder). Each child would be allowed to have five poems or prose pieces in the book. When the child first puts his pieces into the "book" one transcribing skill would be presented. This could be commas, periods, spelling of an ending (such as "ing"), spelling of a common word (such as of, the, and), etc. The skill worked on would be one seen to be needed by the child's writing sample. This way the skill would be relevant to the child. Only one editing process would be worked on at each session. If the child understood what was being required from him he would be asked to "correct" this skill in his paper. When the child feels that he knows how to do this skill, another skill would be

taught and the original skill would be placed on a student chart. This chart would be kept in the child's desk and the child would be expected to check his paper according to these skills before he handed the paper in to be discussed.

After the child has five pieces of writing in the "book," he must remove one to place another piece in it. When he has chosen the piece to be removed there would be a conference. In this conference the child would be asked why he chose to remove that particular earlier poem from the book in favor of the later one, and what he likes/dislikes about each piece. This would be done to encourage the child to think about his work and to help him evaluate it. Hopefully this would lead the child to think about the piece as he is writing it.

Half way through the year the children would start writing and publishing books. That is, their stories would be typed up, illustrated, and then bound by a cover. These books would be left in the reading center for all the children to read.

B. Working with Words:

During Drawing/Writing, the students would be allowed to choose their own topics, while during Working with Words the children would work with formal methods of writing. This is to help the children who need more structure in their writing. They could also use the methods presented here and the topics

on the "sharing wall" whenever they felt stuck on what to write. A collection of possible lesson ideas follows.

1. Young children tend to like nonsense poems. One way that they can be used to introduce sight vocabulary and to work with rhymes is suggested by this poem:

> There was an old man from Peru
> Who dreamed he was eating his shoe.
> He woke in the night
> In a terrible fright
> And found it was perfectly true.

Working as a class we would read this poem together (it would have been presented to the class earlier, perhaps in a listening activity). By having the whole class read together no one child is singled out as a poor reader or embarrassed. Then the poem could be read aloud by two or three of the children who want to try it. The poem would be on long cards and in a chart that would hold the cards. Each stanza would be on a separate card, except for the words that would be changed: "shoe" and "it was perfectly true." After reading the poem the children would be asked to pick another type of clothing to replace the word "shoe." Then they would be asked to think up a rhyming word. Once this was done the class would work on making an ending sentence to fit that word. The teacher would need to prepare an option for each article of clothing that the children might think of. This would provide examples of ways it could be done and prevent the pace of the activity from being lost if the children get stuck.

e.g. "hat" . . . . "And found he had turned into a bat"

"shirt" . . . "And found himself rolling in dirt"

"coat" . . . "And found himself sitting on a goat"

This method works best with nonsense rhymes and with Mother Goose poems such as, "Polly put the kettle on."

Polly put the kettle on
Polly put the kettle on
Polly put the kettle on
We'll all have tea

In this poem the children would change the word "kettle" to another utensil that one could put on the stove, and then they would have to change the last line so that it made sense. The non-rhyming poems would most likely be easier for the children so they should be tried first. The rhyming poems could be used after the children had caught on.

adapted from: McCracken, Marlene J. and McCracken, Robert A. "Teaching Reading Through Children's Books, Poetry, and Song." Pub. Date 17 May 1980, pp. 1-17 in ERIC ED186844.

ii. Dr. Seuss books are full of rhyme patterns that can be used to help the children notice and use rhymes. For example, in the story, Green Eggs and Ham, stanzas are constantly being repeated. The teacher could read the new stanza and then read the repeated lines leaving out the second rhyme in each stanza.

Would you eat them in a box?
Would you eat them with a fox?

Not in a box.
Not with a ___.
Not in a house.
Not with a _____.

I would not eat them here or there.
I would not eat them _____.

The class could then call out the correct rhyming word for that stanza. This will not only help the children with rhymes but it makes them active participants in the activity.

GREEN EGGS AND HAM by Dr. Seuss. Copyright 1960 by Random House, Inc., New York pp. 22 & 24.

iii. Poems could be used to stimulate writing ideas. For example Judith Viorst's poem "Harvey" (from "If I Were in Charge of the World . . .",) is written from a child's point of view and talks about the child's best friend Harvey. Harvey has many admirable characteristics including being able to share secrets, remembering important details such as that the child likes jelly beans (except black), and being able to share good and bad times with the child. After reading this poem the children could write about a close friend that they feel they can tell secrets to, including information such as what they do together and how they feel about the person.

iv. In a collaboration poem, each child contributes a line to the poem. The teacher leads the class with a phrase or theme that repeats throughout the poem. In one type of collaboration

poem the teacher would ask the children to think of a statement that is totally false. This idea could be put into the phrase "I am a . . ." or, as the children get used to this method, a more complex statement such as "I am a . . . and I live . . .". He could then ask for an example from one of the children, or if necessary, he could provide an example such as "I am a purple fish and I live on Mars."

It is better if the teacher does not provide the first example, since the children might think that it is the only type of acceptable answer. Also, to encourage a variety of responses, after the student's example is given, the teacher might say "yes, that is one possible way of completing it." All of the students' responses would be written on the board. After the first example is given, the teacher would then ask if the children understand what is being asked of them. If some of the children still do not understand, he would ask for another example and explain how each part fits in with the stated conditions.

When the children understand the task, he would ask them to raise their hands if they have an idea for one of the poetry lines. When about half of the children have an idea (or after 2-3 minutes, whichever came first) the teacher would start calling on the children to give their statements. After all the students in the class have given a line of the poem, it would be read by the class together. This poem would later be typed up and placed in the book with the other children's poems.

During Drawing/Writing, a child could use this method with one or two of the other children, each one taking turns thinking up lines and writing them down.

Other topics for collaboration poems include: I wish; I used to/but now; I dreamt; I am sad when; Spring is. If asked, the children could probably add to this list.

adapted from: Wishes, Lies, and Dreams, by Kenneth Koch. Vintage Books/Chelsea House Publishers, New York, Co. 1970

v. As a group, the class could compare poems describing similar topics, but which are written in different styles. The teacher would read one of the poems and ask if the children liked it--"What did you like/not like? How does it make you feel? What does it make you think about the topic?" Then he would read the contrasting poem and ask the same questions. Finally they would compare the two poems (the poems might need to be reread) and the children would be asked, "Do you like one poem more than the other?" (the class might want to take a vote), "What do you like best about each poem?", etc.

vi. At the end of the year the children could put on a play of the poem "Disobedience" (slightly revised), by A. A. Milne. This poem would take seven children to perform, and the other children would make up the audience. This could be done with other poems until each child had a chance to be an actor. Children enjoy doing plays and it seems to increase their interest in reading.

Disobedience

Reader 1: James James
Morrison Morrison
Weatherby George Dupree
Took great
Care of his Mother,
Though he was only three
James James
Said to his Mother,

James: "Mother,"

Reader 1: he said, said he:

James: "You must never go down to the end of the town,
if you don't go down with me."

Reader 2: James James
Morrison's Mother
Put on a golden gown,
James James
Morrison's Mother
Drove to the end of the town.
James James
Morrison's Mother
Said to herself, said she:

Mother: "I can get right down to the end of the town
and be back in time for tea."

Reader 3: King John
Put up a notice,

King: "LOST or STOLEN or STRAYED!
JAMES JAMES
MORRISON'S MOTHER
SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN MISLAID.
LAST SEEN
WANDERING VAGUELY
QUITE OF HER OWN ACCORD.
SHE TRIED TO GET DOWN TO THE END OF THE TOWN
-- FORTY SHILLINGS REWARD."

Reader 3: King John
Said he was sorry,
So did the Queen and Prince.
King John
(Somebody told me)
Said to a man he knew:

King: "If people go down to the end of the town, well,
what can <u>anyone</u> do?"

Reader 4: James James
Morrison Morrison

James: (Commonly known as Jim)

Reader 4: Told his
Other relations
Not to go blaming him .
James James
Said to his Mother,

James: "Mother,"

Reader 4: he said, said he:

James: "You must never go down to the end of the town
without consulting me."

Group (softly): James James
Morrison Morrison
Weatherby George Dupree
Took great
Care of his Mother,
Though he was only three
James James
Said to his Mother,
"Mother" he said, said he

Group (loudly): "You must never go down to the end of
the town if you don't go down with ME!"

"Disobedience." From WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG by A. A. Milne. Copyright, 1924 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. Copyright renewal 1952 by A. A. Milne. Reprinted by permission of the publishers, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. and Curtis Brown Ltd. on behalf of the Estate of A.A. Milne

C. Listening:

This is a time of the day set aside for the children to listen to, and interact with, one or two poems. This time would occur five to 15 minutes before the children go to lunch. After the teacher reads a poem, the children would not be asked to summarize, explain, or analyze character, since this rapidly draws the children from the aesthetic experience created by the poetry and isolates the actual functions of reading. Instead, the general feelings created by the poem should be encouraged and

the children's thoughts and comments should be the starting point for discussion. If the children do not spontaneously come up with these, the teacher can ask questions which lead them back to the poem, helping them to extract what they experienced from the reading. Examples of questions which help spark discussion include: "What caught your interest most? What pleased, frightened, surprised? What troubled? What seemed wrong? What things in your own life paralleled those in the poem?" (Rosenblatt 1980, p. 393). Questions which the teacher does not want to ask are ones which have a quick or yes/no answer, and ones which have a "right" answer, particularly where a moral value is placed on the question, such as "Is it right to steal?" (ie. what this child in the poem did was wrong therefore the poem is bad and the child should not like it).

Besides discussion, other ways of involving the children in the poems include having them act out the different parts in the poem, or by having them draw a picture which either goes with the poem or shows how the poem made the child feel. After the children have a feeling for the poem, other aspects, such as summarizing, can be explored. The goal is to help the children actively interact with reading in a positive, rewarding and learning way.

The poems read to the children should be taken from professional poets, other children's poetry, and from poems written in class. These three groups are chosen to help the children realize that their writings are as important as the ones published in books, and that the poems in books are written by people like themselves. The poetry written by other children is

used not only to point out that the poems are written by children like themselves, but also because their poems are more sincere and do not preach or talk down to the children. Also they tend to be able to talk about emotional characteristics without being mushy -- unlike many of the adults who write children's poetry. For these reasons I feel that some of the best poetry for children is written by other children. One source of children's poetry is Green is like a Meadow of Grass: An anthology of Children's Pleasure in Poetry, edited by Nancy Larrick.

i. "Invitation"

> If you are a dreamer, come in,
> If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
> A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer . . .
> If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire
> For we have some flax-golden tales to spin.
> Come in!
> Come in!
>
> --Shel Silverstein

This poem would be hung on the door. After reading it a few times to the class, so that each child is familiar with it, the poem would be used for a discussion. Audrey Shillington (1981), used this poem with her first grade class. She found that the children started to question whether the poem should have included a liar in with the people he was inviting in. When they discussed the poem as a class, they decided that the poem was actually inviting every one in, so it was all right to invite the liar in.

It seems that one of the keys to making a program like this work is listening to the children and picking up on their ideas and questions as they occur, rather than having a specifically laid out plan. The child needs to realize that reading and

writing are relevant to him, and are a way of dealing with issues as they occur. Also, one of the dangers of a carefully laid out plan is that it is hard to stray from it without being afraid that you will not finish the curriculum. With a more open curriculum, the teacher needs to know where each child is and judge what he is ready for next.

"Invitation." From WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS by Shel Silverstein. Copyright 1974 by Shel Silverstein. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

ii. Listening time will also be used to talk about how the children feel about a poem and how the poem relates to them.

"The Little Boy and The Old Man"

Said the little boy, "sometimes I drop my spoon."
Said the little old man, "I do that too."
The little boy whispered, "I wet my pants."
"I do that too," laughed the little old man.
Said the little boy, "I often cry."
The old man nodded, "so do I."
"But worst of all," said the boy, "it seems
Grown-ups don't pay attention to me."
And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand
"I know what you mean," said the little old man.
--Shel Silverstein

Questions such as, "What do you think of the poem? How does it make you feel? Do you ever feel like grown-ups don't pay

attention to you? How does that make you feel" would be addressed.

"The Little Boy and the Old Man." From A LIGHT IN THE ATTIC by Shel Silverstein. Copyright 1981 by Shel Silverstein. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

iii. One of the ways to get the children involved in the poem being read is by having them act out the person's or animal's role. These poems can be taken from the poet of the month (note section v.), from social studies topics (such as poems written by Indians), from topics in science, etc. They can also be taken from poems which have a lot of movement, such as David McCord's poem "Every Time I Climb a Tree" (the following is only the first stanza of McCord's poem).

Every time I climb a tree
Every time I climb a tree
Every time I climb a tree
I scrape a leg
Or skin a knee
And every time I climb a tree
I find some ants
Or dodge a bee
And get the ants
All over me

"Every Time I Climb a Tree." From FAR AND FEW by David McCord. Copyright 1952 by David McCord. Reprinted by permission of Little, Brown and Co.

iv. "The Adventure of Isabel" is a long poem by Ogden Nash, but each stanza can be read as a separate piece. This is a particularly good poem to use with young children since Isabel is able to conquer many of the worst fears of children. One way the poem might be worked with is by having the children draw a

picture to go with each stanza. The six stanzas of this poem involve the topics of meeting an enormous bear, a wicked witch, a hideous giant, a troublesome doctor, a horrible creature in a dream, and a bugaboo.

v. Poet of the month

Each month a different poet's work would be looked at, and a few times a week one of his or her poems would be read during "listening" time. While we are studying a particular artist, his or her picture would be hung on the wall and as many appropriate books of theirs as can be found would be placed around the scarecrow in the reading center. Poets that might be included are: Elizabeth Coatsworth, Aileen Fisher, Karla Kuskin, Myra Cohn Livingston, David McCord, Eve Merriam, A. A. Milne, Ogden Nash, and Shel Silverstein.

vi. Throughout the school year, the children would give presentations of their poetry and prose. The child presenting would be given a chance to rehearse earlier in the day, and would not read his poem until he felt that he was ready. At the start of the year, the child would only read his piece, but as the year went on, questions about what the child wrote would be asked. These questions would be modeled by the teacher and would be similar to the questions asked during the conferences. After the children get an idea of the type of questions that will be asked, one or two of the children would be allowed to also ask questions. The questions should help the children learn more

about how they write and should increase their awareness of writing for an audience.

D. Science/Family

During this time of the day the poetry would be used as a supplement to the science activities, or to spark discussion in both the family and science areas. The following lesson ideas are just brief examples of how this might be done.

i. One of the experiments that children tend to enjoy involves changing cream into butter. The cream is placed into a jar with a tight lid and shaken back and forth. This step tends to take a long time, and a good poem to read while this is going on might be "The King's Breakfast" by A. A. Milne. In this poem the King wants some butter for his bread and the Dairymaid asks the cow for it, but the cow suggests that the King try marmalade instead. After the poem is over the class could talk about where butter and cream come from.

ii. In the Science Center there would be an aquarium which would be filled with various types of animals throughout the year. A poem relating to the animal would be taped next to the aquarium. The poem would be changed at the start of each week. The teacher would read the poem at that time and use it to start a discussion about the animal. For example, on a unit about mice, two or

three mice would be kept in the aquarium. The poem "Mice" by R. Fyleman can be used to introduce the mice. This poem describes what mice look like and how Ms. Fyleman feels about them. The poem could be used as a guide when observing the mice, "Do the mice have long tails and small faces? . . ." Other questions that stimulate discussion are, "What else do you want to know about mice?" (suggestions would be written on the board and be dealt with in future lessons) and "How do you feel about mice?". Elizabeth Coatworth's poem "The Mouse" could then be used the next week. This poem introduces questions about mice that live in a house, but not as pets. Questions for discussion would include "What do mice eat?", "How are pet mice different from mice that live free in the house?", and "Why don't people like them?".

iii. The following two poems could be used to start a discussion on how some animals eat grass and other plants, while some animals eat other animals. This would lead to a brief outline of the food chain process.

A Bird came down the Walk --
He did not know I saw --
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,
--Emily Dickinson

The sea gull curves his wings
The sea gull turns his eyes.
Get down into the water, fish!
(If you are wise.)

The sea gull slants his wings,
The sea gull turns his head.
Get down into the water, fish!
(Or you'll be dead.)
--Elizabeth Coatsworth

"A Bird came down the Walk-" #328 by Emily Dickinson (Copyright 1862 by Harvard University Press).
"The Sea Gull Curves His Wings." From SUMMER GREEN by Elizabeth Coatsworth. Copyright 1947 by Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. Copyright renewal 1975 by Elizabeth Coatsworth Beston.

iv. As part of a science unit on plants, the children can create a "poem-flower". After learning about seeds, the children would be given some flowering seeds, dirt, and a small paper cup to plant them in. After the plant has grown a couple of inches the childrer would start making planters for their flowers. The bottom half of a cardboard milk carton would be decorated on three sides. On the fourth side the children would put their favorite poem (one that the child has written himself) in a final typed form. The plant would then be transplanted into the milk carton.

This plant could be made for the child or as a gift for a special day such as "Mother's Day." If the plant is going to be used as a gift the child might want the poem to reflect the occasion.

v. When discussing the children's families, poems might be used to talk about issues that are sometimes confusing. For example, Doris Orgel's poem "To His Cousin" addresses the idea that sometimes we love the other members of our family and sometimes we don't. And Judith Viorst's poem "Some Things Don't Make Any Sense At All" talks about having a new baby in the family.

E. Poetry might be used at other times in the class room, such as during recess and birthdays.

The street rhyme of:

Rain, rain, go away,
Come again another day.
Donny and I want to play.

could be used on rainy days as an indoor recess game. The children might throw a bean bag to each other and sing this poem, replacing the name "Donny" with the name of the person they were throwing to. For example, as the child said ". . . Karen and I want to play" he would throw the bean bag to Karen, and then Karen would repeat the rhyme.

Jack be nimble,
Jack be quick,
Jack jump over
The candlestick.

Jump it lively,
Jump it quick,
But don't knock over
The candlestick.

This rhyme could also be made into a game with the aid of a large unbreakable candle. The children could be divided into teams with each team getting one point when they successfully jump over the candlestick.

On the child's birthday, he should be allowed to choose any poem to be read in his honor. "The Birthday Bus" by Mary Ann Hoberman and "The End" by A. A. Milne are two poems about being six that might be read on this occasion.

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